



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 21, 2007

*Office of the United States Attorney
District of Arizona*

For Information Contact Public Affairs
WYN HORNBUCKLE
Telephone: (602) 514-7625
Cell: (602) 525-2681

TWO HOSTAGE TAKERS TIED TO VIOLENT ALIEN SMUGGLING ORGANIZATION SENTENCED

PHOENIX – Two Mexican citizens tied to a violent alien smuggling organization responsible for holding over 100 people hostage in January 2003 were sentenced here Monday by U.S. District Judge Roger G. Strand. Juan Manuel Medrano-Pereira, 22, was sentenced to 157 months and Gerardo Lazaro-Ascencio, 30, was sentenced to 262 months in prison. Both men pleaded guilty to Possession and Use of a Firearm during and in relation to a crime of violence.

Both men are currently serving other prison sentences and will serve their prison terms consecutive to their present incarceration. Medrano-Pereira is now serving a two year federal sentence for Re-entry After Deportation and six months for violating supervised release in a 2003 case. Lazaro-Ascencio is presently serving a 10 year sentence for two unrelated kidnaping cases charged in Maricopa Superior Court.

The two men were the last of eight men to be charged in a hostage taking and alien smuggling conspiracy that occurred in January 2003. They were part of a group that held over 100 illegal aliens hostage during a two week period at a residence in Phoenix. While held hostage at gunpoint, the victims were beaten with fists, kicked, pistol whipped, and threatened with death. A female victim was raped. One victim had his face burned with a cigarette. Other victims had a plastic bags put over their heads and were beaten until they could not breath.

Four of the other six men pleaded guilty to Conspiracy to take Hostages and Conspiracy to Harbor Illegal Aliens. One of those men, Fabian Franco-Saenz, was sentenced to 10 years in Maricopa County Superior Court for the rape of one of the victims, and received an additional federal sentence of over 19 years in prison.

The remaining two men, Jesus Medina-Navarez and Ruben Franco-Plaza were the leaders of the group. They went to trial in October 2006 and received life sentences followed by a consecutive seven year term when sentenced by Judge Strand in January.

These eight defendants have been linked to a violent human smuggling group referred to as the Franco Alien Smuggling Organization. Since 2001, over 100 men and women with ties to this organization have been successfully prosecuted. Only two of those people, were lawfully residing in the United States.

The investigation leading to the pleas of guilty and sentence was conducted by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Pinal County Sheriff's Office, Phoenix Police Department and the Peoria Police Department. The prosecution was handled by Lisa Jennis Settel, Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Arizona, Phoenix.

-MORE-

CASE NUMBER: CR-05-225-PHX-RGS
RELEASE NUMBER: 2007-086(Medrano-Pereira&Lazaro-Ascencio)
#